

## **EFFECT OF MARITAL INSTABILITY ON CHILDREN IN ABEOKUTA METROPOLIS**

**<sup>1\*</sup>Comfort Omoniyi-Oyafunke PhD, <sup>1</sup>Hezekiah Olubusayo Falola, <sup>2</sup>Odunayo Paul Salau**

<sup>1\*</sup>Department of Sociology/Psychology, Olabisi Onabanjo University, Ago-Iwoye

<sup>1,2</sup>Department of Business Management, College of Development Studies, Covenant University, Ota, Ogun State, Nigeria

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**ABSTRACT:** *Marriage instability has hindered the growth and progress of many homes and children in Nigeria. Many factors could be responsible for this disappointing situation. The study therefore focused on identifying effects of marital instability on children in Abeokuta Metropolis. A descriptive research method was adopted for the study. The total numbers of two hundred and fifty one (251) respondents were selected from Abeokuta Metropolis using stratified and systematic sampling technique with the use questionnaires to collect information from respondents who participated in the study. The data collected were carefully analysed using percentages supported by chi-square to represent the raw data in a meaningful manner. It was discovered that children of divorced/separated are prone to drug addiction, armed robbery, commercial sex workers and other forms of criminal activity, not only that they also tend to go wayward, naughty, unruly and rebellious. The study also established that children who grow up in a single parent family are more likely to be used for trafficking, rituals and house helps than the children who grow up in an intact family. It is therefore recommended that family counselling be emphasized by the stakeholders (government, religious leaders, and counsellors to minimise instability in the family and effort should be intensified to discourage marital discord.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Marital Instability; Divorce, Separated, Marriage, Family, Children, Metropolis*

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### **BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY**

Marriage is the oldest social institution ordained by God as a social contract between two individuals to become husband and wife. Marriage as ordained by God gives legitimacy to sexual relationship and reproduction for legitimate children (Sarker, 2007). Marriage is the state of being united with a person of the opposite sex as husband or wife for the purpose companionship, procreation maintaining a family (Gove, 2006). However, marital instability has become a thing of concern in this contemporary society and this is associated with separation, divorce, and widowhood. Separation and divorce are social phenomena created by either husband or the wife or both, but widowhood is beyond the control of human being, it is related to death and thus universal (Amina 2008). Meanwhile, separation may be in two categories: physical Separation i.e. when the husband and the wife reside separately without resolving their marital tie; mental separation i.e. when the couple decides to live together in the same household but without having biological and psychological relations. It is imperative to note that when marriage is dissolved in the court of law, it is called divorce, but when it is dissolved by death is called widowhood (Amina, 2008). Meanwhile, the term marital instability is used to refer to the process whereby marriages breakdown through separation, desertion or divorce (Lesmin & Sarah, 2008). The concept of

women in this study is associated with the ladies who are victims of marital instability due to separation and divorce by their husbands. Unfortunately, many children today are faced with the challenges of multiple divorces or separations within their families. Parents who divorce often go on to remarry or form other intimate relationships have higher incidence of failure (Amato, 2000; Wallerstein, Lewis, & Blakeslee, 2000; Ward, 2002). The children are defined here who are also victims of marital instability of their parents and they are below 18 years of age. The significant of this study steams from its objectives as follows:

- To critically examine the nature and cause of marital instability
- To find out the socio-economic state of the children who are victim of marital instability.
- To explore the problems of separated and divorced women and their children in relation to criminal activities.
- To know the survival process of the women and their children who are victim of marital instability.

## REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The study of effect of marital instability on children has fast become a central point for both discussion and research among Social Scientists. It has been observed that the rise in the divorce rate over the years is one of the fundamental changes in Nigeria society. A substantial number of women and children now spend some fraction of their life in single female-headed households, leading many to be concerned about their socio-economic circumstances (Manning & Gupta, 2009). The dynamics of culture and human relationships have made researchers to observe many influences, manifestations, happenings and occurrences in marriage stability within the African society. These manifestations and occurrences have significant impact on marriage within a society. However, a recent observation on people's attitude to marriages, suggest an alarming negative effect of these impacts (Borgatta & Edgor, 2000). It is pertinent to note here that marriage is the state of being united with a person of the opposite sex as husband or wife; the mutual relation of the husband and wife; the institution whereby men and women are joined in a special kind of social and legal dependence for the purpose of founding and maintaining a family; an act of marrying or rite by which the married status is effected (Gove, 2006). Marriage is considered to represent a lifelong commitment by two people to each other and it is signified by a contract sanctioned by the state. It thus involves legal rights, responsibilities, and duties that are enforced by both secular and sacred laws. As a legal contract ratified by the state, marriage can only be dissolved with state permission (Borgatta & Edgor, 2000). In Nigeria for instance, every tribe recognizes some form of the institution of marriage. In most cultures, and religions matured man or woman is considered to be incomplete without a spouse (Aiyetan & Kolapo, 2005, Smith, 2001). It must be noted that there are different groups, traditions and different marriages but they have one specific thing in common and that is the changes of the weddings and marriages pattern, which are influenced by the Western societies (Holley, 2001). The influence of the western culture is making the traditional polygamous marriage fading away and gradually disappearing in this contemporary Nigeria society (Aiyetan & Kolapo, 2005) in another development, marital instability has been described as a situation whereby the couples deliberately decided to separate for one reason or the other. The concept of marital instability is associated with separation, divorce and widowhood. Separation and divorce are social phenomena which are allowed or created by

the husband or the wife or of both. Meanwhile, widowhood is beyond the control of human being because it is related to death. (Lesmin & Sarah, 2008; Amina, 2010). Meanwhile, Dunkins, 2000 posited that there are numbers of factors that are seriously threatening stability of marriage in Nigeria and most of these factors are traceable to some inherited behaviour and thinking from the ancient African society, and imported ideas from other sources that are beyond the African concept of marriage. These factors are the significant causes of marriage instability in Nigeria society; as a result of their functions and effects within a home. In another development, Abu & Ardayfio-Schandorf, (2000) noted that the conjugal family is weak in residential and economic terms when compared with the matrilineage. Asare, (2005) also observed that families nowadays seem not to care about their wards marriages because in most cases, the choice of partner is made by the wards themselves contrary to tradition, where a choice was made by parents. The trend now is that men and women marry where they are working or studying. In spite of its indispensability, marriage has been affected by many problems that have threatened its usefulness and very existence.

### **Causes of Marital Instability**

The high rate of divorce cannot be farfetched from the inadequate length of courtship before marriage, dissimilarities between spouses in social and economic characteristics such as social class, ethnicity, religion and age (Danso, 2008; Boakye & Ardayfio, 2005; Boateng, 2000). Other causes include sterility, adultery, desertion and excessive cruelty. Danso, 2008 noted a high rate of divorce among the young highly educated women with few children than among the old, illiterate women with many children. He pointed out that the greatest pressure on divorcees to seek new marital partners is economic. Kabwegyere (2002), opined that minority of wealthy divorced women, however, prefers to stay single. Boakye & Ardayfio, (2005) posited that the fragility of the marital bond is a notable feature of the contemporary world and thus, spares no continent and is present at every level of society. It makes society delicate and even endangers the education task and the trust that sustains a home. All too often it leads to numerous separation as well as divorce. One sometimes has the impression that separation and divorce are considered the only way out of marital crisis. This is part of the growing “divorce mentality” which is the product of marriage instability. Difficulties frequently lead to real friction and conflicts that lead to separation, divorce, even murder, where a man kills his wife or the wife killing the husband. It is obvious from increasing rate of divorce, (U.S. Bureau of Census, 1994), cases of single parents (Bledsoe, 1993; Blankenhorn, 2003), Wife battering (Olarinmoye 1998); that these are among the resultant effect of marriage instability in contemporary Nigerian society. Marriage instability has made society to currently witness the invasion of many areas of human activity by an essential individualism; economic life, excessive competition etc. Meanwhile (Onyia & Aniche, 2002; Nkwocha, 2002; Kumuyi, 2004; Ezech, 2000) highlighted some of the causes of marital instability to include: childlessness, unsatisfactory sexual relationship, non-payment of dowry; Polygyny; Rumor and faction; Lack of commitment towards marriage, sexual incompatibility and infidelity; Lack of communication between spouses; Abandonment, Alcohol Addiction, Substance Abuse; Physical Abuse, Sexual Abuse and Emotional Abuse; Inability to manage or resolve conflict; Differences in personal and career goals; Different expectations about household tasks and financial problems; Intellectual Incompatibility and Inflexibility; Mental Instability or Mental Illness; Religious beliefs, cultural and lifestyle differences. Linus, 2012, explained that desperation, especially on the part of the female folks, was a major cause of divorce. He added that most young women feel, it is a must to get married at an early age while the older ones cannot stand the stigma of not being

married, therefore, they enter into marriages not minding what it may cost because they must get married and some of them in their desperation avoid marriage counseling and courtship so that the man would not change his mind. Meanwhile, some families due to poverty give away their female children in order to make some money, she added that parents who cannot afford to train their female children give them out for marriage so that she could fetch them money. They force them into an unwanted or unplanned marital life and thereby making the couple resort to divorce by the time they realise the union was against their will and this will definitely affect the children upbringing and development (Price & McKenry, 2008).

### **Statement of the Problem**

The increase in divorce rates is one of the most visible changes in contemporary family life. (Lesthaeghe 2005). Several studies have reported how children living in divorced and other lone parent families tend to have lower levels of economic well-being, and how the cross-national variation in these gaps is closely related to support from the welfare state (Vlemminckx and Smeeding 2000; Aassve et al. 2007; Heuveline and Weinshenker 2008). The increase of the new forms of instability calls for a deep analysis of the new phenomena in order to understand their causes and consequences. Instability and the breakdown of family and conjugal ties have relevant consequences of demographic, social and economic nature for the persons involved. There are negative consequences on the wellbeing of separated or divorced partners as well as on their children's, and the risks of poverty for women with children increase. The problem therefore is to examine the extent at which marital instability affect children. Secondly, to find out the socio-economic state of the children who are victim of marital instability. Thirdly, to determine the level of influence of different educational background of the couples on marital instability. To explore the problems of separated and divorced women and their children in relation to criminal activities.

### **Importance of the Study**

The survey becomes necessary because of the alarming rate of marital instability in Nigeria. However, this study is essential because it will help providing an insight to the effect of marital instability on Children. The outcome of the study will give the society or family institution the opportunity to be aware of the general causes of marital instability and the best way to manage them.

### **Hypotheses**

As obtained in the reviewed literature above, marital instability is associated with deviance, separation, desertion, widowhood etc. (Anima, 2008; Lesmin & Sarah, 2008). These tend to affect the children if not now but also in the nearest future; therefore we propose the following hypotheses:

H<sub>1</sub>: There is significant relationship between marital instability and children unethical Habits

H<sub>2</sub>: Marital instability has significant effect on children well being

### **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

The empirical data for the study were collected through questionnaires. The study population covers married couples in Abeokuta metropolis; Ogun State of Nigeria. Knowing well how

Abeokuta metropolis is; the researcher decided to target his audience at Oke Ilewo, Ibara, Ita Eko, Abiola Way, Oke Mosan, Isale Igbein, Onikolobo and Asero area of Abeokuta metropolis. Purposive and convenience sampling methods were adopted in selecting participants for this study. Purposive in the sense that only married individuals were used and convenience in the sense that married individuals in different offices who created time in responding to our questionnaires in Abeokuta metropolis were used. The research instrument was divided into two sections, the first tends to obtain the respondent biodata while the second part contains the items regarding the constructs of the subject matter and this was based on a five-point Likert scale ( 5-Strongly Agreed, 4- Agree, 3-Undecided, 2-Strongly Disagree, 1-Disagree) that best describes the extent to which the respondents agree with each items in the questionnaire. The methods that were used to analyze the data in this work was descriptive methods of analysis. The opinions of the respondents on each question are weighed using simple percentage. This is done so as to ascertain the average opinion of the respondents. A total of 320 questionnaires were administered within the scope of selected location, having sorted the returned questionnaires, the final valid sample size for the analysis was 251. The study tend to add to the existing literature on effect of marital instability on children in Nigeria in general and in Abeokuta in particular.

## RESULT & DISCUSSION

### Respondents Demography

**Table I: Demographic and Socio-economic Characteristics of Respondents**

	Frequency	Percentage
<b>Gender:</b>		
Male	130	51.6
Female	121	48.4
	<b>251</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>Age:</b>		
20-29	83	33
30-39	98	39
40 and above	70	28
Total	<b>251</b>	100%
<b>Marital Status</b>		
Married	167	66.7
Others	84	33.3
<b>Total</b>	<b>251</b>	<b>100%</b>
<b>Educational qualification</b>		
WAEC/GCE/NECO	44	17.5
OND/NCE	58	23
B.Sc/BA/HND	126	50
M.Sc/MBA & Above	23	9.2
<b>Total</b>	<b>251</b>	<b>100%</b>
<b>Nature of Work of the respondents</b>		
Civil Servant	102	40.8

Public Servant	48	19.2
Private Business	84	33.3
Others	15	06.7
<b>Total</b>	<b>251</b>	<b>100%</b>
<b>Marriage Anniversary</b>		
Below 5 years	73	29.2
5 – 10 years	107	42.5
10-15 years	31	12.5
15-20 years	21	8.3
20-25 years	19	7.5
<b>Total</b>	<b>251</b>	<b>100%</b>

**Source: Researcher's Analysis of Field Survey, 2013**

Following from Table I, 51.6% of the sample size were male while 48.4% were female, which implies that the population of male respondent is higher than female. Meanwhile, over 72% of the respondents were within an economically active population. Moreover, all the respondents were married, separated or divorced. Regarding the nature of work of the respondents, 60% public/civil servant; while 40.0% are into their private business and petty trading. Meanwhile, the marriage anniversary of 69.8% of the respondents fall between 5-25 years which make the respondents authority in responding to the questionnaire administered to them.

### **Descriptive statistics of respondents on effect of marital instability on children unethical behaviour**

**Table II**

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation	Skewness		Kurtosis	
	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Std. Error	Statistic	Std. Error
Children who find themselves in unstable homes tend to be aggressive in nature	251	1.00	5.00	4.1992	.82955	-1.404	.154	2.873	.306
Children of divorced parents tend to be deviants by virtue of the fact that there was no one to monitor them and control their behavior	251	1.00	5.00	4.1434	.91397	-.922	.154	.347	.306
Children of the divorced or separated parents tend to go wayward, naughty, unruly and rebellious	251	2.00	5.00	4.3187	.72802	-.949	.154	.791	.306
Children of divorced parents are more likely to be used for child trafficking than the children who grow up in an intact family	251	1.00	5.00	4.1833	.83323	-.857	.154	.405	.306
Valid N (listwise)	251								

**Source: Researcher's Analysis of Field Survey, 2014**



The skewness and kurtosis are of primary important because they are indicative of extent to which variables are not normally distributed. Kline, 1998 posited that skewness above 3.0 and kurtosis above 10 indicate serious departures from normality in a distribution. With this criteria, none of the variables posed any problem of normality. However, from table II, Children who find themselves in unstable homes tend to be aggressive in nature (Mean = 4.1992). In addition, most of the respondents agreed that Children of divorced parents tend to be deviants by virtue of the fact that there was no one to monitor them and control their behavior (Mean = 4.1434). Meanwhile it was also discovered that Children of the divorced or separated parents tend to go wayward, naughty, unruly and rebellious (Mean of = 4.3187). Besides, children of divorced parents are more likely to be used for child trafficking than the children who grow up in an intact family (Mean = 4.1833). Therefore, it would be concluded that there is significant relationship between marital instability and children unethical habits

### Descriptive statistics of respondents on effect of marital instability on children wellbeing

Table III

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation	Skewness		Kurtosis	
	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Std. Error	Statistic	Std. Error
Children of divorced, separated and deserted mothers are deprived of quality education, proper socialization and good home training.	251	1.00	5.00	3.9402	1.08463	-1.018	.154	.432	.306
Children of divorced parents are more used for child trafficking than the children who grow up in an intact family.	251	1.00	5.00	3.7092	1.17944	-.554	.154	-.876	.306
Children of the divorced parent tend to end up as house help.	251	1.00	5.00	3.8606	1.05474	-.790	.154	-.089	.306
Children of divorced or separated women often suffer economic hardship.	251	2.00	5.00	4.5697	.60508	-1.526	.154	3.303	.306
Valid N (listwise)	251								

Source: Researcher's Analysis of Field Survey, 2014

Sequel to table III, majority of the respondents were of the opinion that Children of divorced, separated and deserted mothers are deprived of quality education, proper socialization and good home training (Mean = 3.9402). In addition, most of the respondents believe that children of divorced parents are more used for child trafficking than the children who grow up in an intact family. (Mean = 3.7092). However, it was also discovered that children of the divorced parent tend to end up as house help (Mean = 3.8606) besides, it was also discovered that children of divorced

or separated women often suffer economic hardship (Mean = 4.5697) Therefore, it would be concluded that Marital instability has significant effect on children well being.

## CONCLUSION/RECOMMENDATIONS

The study examined the effect of marital instability on children in Abeokuta Metropolis, Ogun State, South West, Nigeria. Meanwhile, all the relationships proposed among the variables in the research model were tested and it was found that relationship exists amongst the variables having subjected the collected data to empirical analysis with the use of descriptive statistics. However, the results of the findings indicated that children of divorced/separated are prone to drug addiction, armed robbery, commercial sex workers and other forms of criminal activity. The reason is that most of them tend to be deviants or non-conformist by virtue of the fact that there was no body to monitor them and control their behaviour. Meanwhile, it was also discovered that children of the divorced/separated parents tend to go wayward, naughty, unruly and rebellious. Furthermore, the study also established that children who grow up in a single parent family are more used for trafficking, rituals and house helps than the children who grow up in an intact family. Majority of the respondents also agreed that children of the divorced parents are likely to face rejection, suffering and economic hardship and those of them that find themselves in unstable homes tend to be aggressive in nature and are more likely to be fostered out than the children whose parents are not divorced. A convincing assessment of the impact of marital instability on children status therefore requires a credibly exogenous determinant of marital instability. The findings from this study demand urgent attention by all concerned, including counselling psychologists, marriage counsellors, religious leaders, married couples and the entire public. This is because the study has revealed and confirmed the reality of marriage instability. Prevention they say is better than cure. Therefore, the results from this study should be of paramount interest and concern to marriage counsellors.

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